DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 109 367 CE 004 152

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TITLE Supervising Paraprofessionals: A Guide for the Trainer-Agent.
INSTITUTION Extension Service (DOA), Washington, D.C.; National Association of State Universities and Land Grant Colleges, Washington, D.C.
PUB DATE Mar 72
NOTE 32p.

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.76 HC-$1.95 PLUS POSTAGE
DESCRIPTORS Administrator Role; Communication (Thought Transfer); Employer Employee Relationship; Employment Interviews; Guides; Job Satisfaction; Job Training; *Leadership Training; *Management Education; Nondirective Counseling; Personnel Evaluation; *Personnel Management; Psychological Needs; Supervision; *Supervisory Methods; Supervisory Training; Work Attitudes
IDENTIFIERS *Paraprofessional Personnel

ABSTRACT

Although the booklet is intended to be a guide for first-time supervisors of paraprofessionals, it is applicable to any supervisory situation. Subjects covered include kinds of leadership, self-evaluation, interviewing job candidates, employee training and evaluation, morale and job satisfaction, basic human needs, the nondirective approach to counseling, conducting group meetings for discussion and decision-making, communication skills and methods, discipline (autocratic vs. democratic) as related to specific problems, controlling the quality of work, and planning and use of time as related to manpower and scheduling. A bibliography is included. (MDW)

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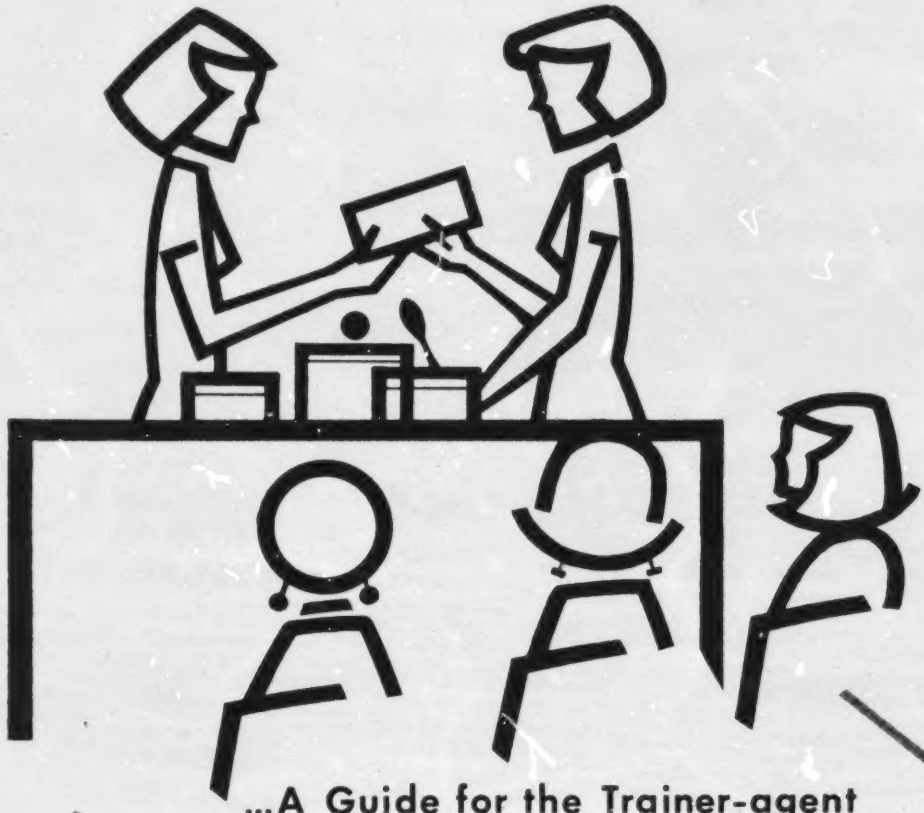

...A Guide for the Trainer-agent

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The Task Force

A task force on the supervision of paraprofessionals met at the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Extension Service, Washington, D.C., October 19-21, 1971, in response to needs expressed by several hundred supervisors of nutrition aides in the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP).

The members of the task force identified common problems, and developed an understanding on principles and techniques of supervising paraprofessionals.

The task force was composed of *Ella Mae Berdahl*, Program Coordinator, EFNEP, USDA, Extension Service, Washington, D.C. (Chairman); *Dr. Opal H. Mann*, Deputy Assistant Administrator, Home Economics, USDA, Extension Service, Washington, D.C. (Consultant); *Barbara S. Warner*, Personnel Management Specialist, USDA, Extension Service, Washington, D.C. (Consultant).

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SUPERVISING
Paraprofessionals
...A Guide for the Trainer-agent

By Dr. Margaret C. Browne

A professional who for the first time is faced with supervising paraprofessionals, might look about for a "recipe book" that would provide "pat" techniques for dealing with personnel problems.

Such a publication probably would be of little value in the long run. Each problem is a complex combination of situations and people, and the *cause*, not the *symptom*, must be discovered before the problem can be effectively handled.

This guide, then, is not a "how to" publication. Rather, it attempts to look at the various facets of supervision and set forth procedures that may keep problems from arising. It also gives some guidance in human relations practices helpful in establishing a positive and understanding relationship between professionals and paraprofessionals.

Eliminating problems, reducing failures, and increasing productivity are among the goals of all supervisors. The purpose of this guide is to provide some insights and principles to help them reach these goals.

YOUR ROLE AS A SUPERVISOR

Fortunately, the old stereotype of supervisors is gone. No longer are they pictured as authoritarians who keep subordinates in line with an iron hand. Rather, they are regarded as leaders who relate to workers in a way that fulfills the organization's goals and provides for satisfaction and development of employees.

As a supervisor, the organizational structure in which you work will determine the extent of your responsibility. It may include everything from hiring to dismissal. It may begin with training and continue through program supervision. Whatever the situation, it is important that you know exactly what your responsibilities and authorities are.

Halsey says that "Supervision . . . is selecting the right person for each job; arousing in each person an interest in his work and teaching him how to do it; measuring and rating performance to be sure that teaching has been fully effective; administering correction where this is found to be necessary and transferring to more suitable work or dismissing those for whom this proves ineffective; commending whenever praise is merited and rewarding for good work; and finally fitting each person harmoniously into the working group—all done fairly, patiently and tactfully so that each person is caused to do his work skillfully, accurately, intelligently, enthusiastically, and completely."[1]

Because the word *supervisor* has negative connotations for many people, and because the role encompasses so many functions, personnel people have searched for new designations. Leader, program director, consultant, and change-agent are among the many that have been tried.

In a situation where a supervisor is also an educator, as is usually the case where a professional is working toward established goals with the assistance of paraprofessionals, *leader* seems to be a good choice.

Leadership

In earlier times it was assumed that leaders were born, not made. When strong social class barriers limited educational opportunities and the "divine right of kings" was accepted as fact, it is understandable that leaders were believed to function because of their inherited traits and characteristics.

With the breakdown of social and economic barriers, a modified theory held that leadership was a function of traits and characteristics that were acquired through experience, education, and special training combined with certain traits such as intelligence and physical stature.

When social scientists began to search for *universal traits* of leaders, they became aware that different situations require different leadership. Jenkins reviewed leadership studies and concluded that "Leadership is specific to the particular situation under investigation. Who becomes a leader of a given group engaging in a particular activity and what the leadership characteristics are in a given case are a function of the specific situation . . . Related to this conclusion is the general finding of wide variations in the characteristics of individuals who became leaders in similar situations, and even greater divergence in leadership in different situations.[2]

Some investigators have suggested that leadership can be understood only if one considers the personality of the follower. It is the follower, as a person, who perceives the leader in a particular situation, and it is his motives, points of view, attitudes, and frames of reference that determine how far and how enthusiastically he will follow the leader.

The theories and research of many social scientists point to leadership as a *social interactional phenomenon* in which attitudes, ideals, and aspirations of the followers play as important a determining role as do the individuality and personality of the leader. Leadership is active only in a problem situation, and it is toward some established goal of the group.

Perhaps a simple working definition of *leader* might be "A person whose behavior stimulates the movement of individuals (or groups) toward a goal."

Kinds of Leadership

Patterns of leadership are commonly classified as authoritarian, *laissez-faire*, and democratic.

When *authority* alone is used to direct and control a group with little or no regard for the will or desires of the members, apathy, aggressiveness, withdrawal, and hostility may result. The organization loses the benefit of ideas the workers could contribute, and the morale of workers is likely to suffer. This does not seem a suitable type of supervision for a professional to use in relation to paraprofessionals.

Laissez-faire supervision implies that the group operates with little or no guidance and assistance. Neither the supervisor nor the group accepts responsibility for activities that would move the group toward its goals. Conflicts arise, cooperation deteriorates, the group disintegrates, and little is accomplished. Certainly such supervision cannot be tolerated in an organization whose objectives have been established by law and that is supported by public funds.

Much research in recent years has demonstrated that *democratic* leadership results in greater development and growth of people, a cooperative group spirit, increased production, and greater acceptance of responsibility. Further, it is consistent with the democratic system we accept as our American way of life.

Democratic leadership is a "we" rather than an "I" kind of supervision. It is control *with* people rather than *over* people. It takes into

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[1] G.D. Halsey, *Supervising People* (New York: Harper and Brothers 1953) p. 6.

[2] W.O. Jenkins, *Psychol. Bull.* 1947, p. 44, 54-79.

account the feelings and needs of the workers. It involves workers in setting goals and determining methods to be used in reaching goals.

A professional educator-supervisor who is implementing a program with the help of paraprofessionals needs their knowledge of the lifestyle of clients and their ability to relate to them, as well as the extra hands and hours of working time provided. Such a leader, striving for team effort and group satisfaction, will use a democratic approach. When the professional and paraprofessionals are working toward goals they have jointly agreed upon, the necessity for *power* or *authority* diminishes.

Social distance (the condition in which groups or individuals are remote or close in terms of attitudes and behavior patterns) may affect supervisory performance. The authoritarian supervisor may feel there is prestige value in distance from the workers and that workers may "get out of line" if they feel too familiar.

Where you are striving for a "team effort" with paraprofessionals, "social distance" should be eliminated as far as possible so that understanding, cooperation, and free communication can flourish. Only the fearful and insecure supervisor is concerned about workers "getting out of line" because of a warm, friendly relationship.

Status within the organization influences supervision. You need to know your place in the hierarchy, your responsibility and authority, in order to feel secure in the knowledge that higher authority will stand back of you as long as you operate within prescribed limits. In addition, you need to have enough influence with your superiors so that needed supplies and personnel will be provided, within budgetary limits.

Status has prestige value with peers and superiors within the organization and in dealings with other agencies. However, research has shown that workers produce better under an "employee centered" supervisor than under one who is "management centered." This indicates that the professional should not strive for outward signs of status that would cause paraprofessionals to feel that their supervisor related more closely to higher management than to them, the workers. Efforts to minimize social distance might prove worthwhile in establishing an employee-oriented climate.

Self-Evaluation

If you are a new supervisor, you may wish for some gauge to tell how you rate. A critical self-evaluation in regard to some of the qualities generally accepted as important in supervision may not be objective or precise, but it can be helpful.

You might ask yourself these questions, and try to think of examples that will back up your "yes" or "no".

- Am I approachable?
- Am I open-minded?
- Am I fair and impartial?
- Do I control my temper?
- Do I keep the promises I make?
- Am I patient?
- Am I consistent?
- Am I appreciative?
- Am I reasonable in my expectations?
- Am I loyal to the paraprofessionals?
- Am I willing to admit mistakes?
- Do I avoid favoritism?
- Do I have a sense of humor?
- Am I normally cheerful and good-natured?

A supervisor who rates well in all of the above questions probably has earned the respect of the workers in her unit and has developed a team spirit that will move them toward their goal.

If you feel deficient in some areas, recognizing the problem is the first step in overcoming it.

EMPLOYMENT

Recruitment is the first step in employing efficient, satisfied paraprofessionals. The overall objectives of the program, the stipulations tied to the financing of the activity, and the organization's personnel policies will to a large extent determine your source of supply.

If, for example, the program is to serve low socioeconomic homemakers in a specific area, you may find prospective employees by contacting leaders familiar with the local situation—social welfare workers, school counselors, low-rent public housing administrators, heads of ethnic and racial groups, ministers, etc.

The importance of selecting the right person for the job cannot be minimized. Sometimes a number of people are involved in employee selection in order to gain the benefit of several viewpoints.

The employment interview has been called the most used and least scientific way to select employees. Yet it serves three distinct functions: It secures information, gives information, and establishes a friendly atmosphere. If in interviewing, you recognize some of the pitfalls and guard against them, the method can be effective and efficient.

Interviewers are sometimes influenced by personal traits that have no bearing on the applicant's ability to do the job. Among objectionable personal traits listed by three untrained interviewers were such characteristics as "loud" clothing; making gestures with hands; "foreign looking"; mousy and basnful; bad breath; doodling; short arms.

Sometimes applicants are disqualified on the basis of one specific trait the interviewer dislikes. The total worth of the applicant is judged on the basis of one characteristic.

Sometimes interviewers transfer their personal biases to the interviewee by the way they phrase a question. They may frame the question in a way that elicits the response they want, or they may hide the true meaning of the question by using difficult words.

Talking over the heads of the interviewees, particularly those who speak little English, is another pitfall of inexperienced interviewers. They may commit the same interviewing error by asking questions about matters with which the applicant is completely unfamiliar.

Interviewers are sometimes influenced by stereotypes. They may, for example, associate certain character traits with certain races or nationalities, or picture redheads as hot-tempered people.

Interviewers sometimes fail to establish rapport and cite this as evidence of tension or lack of communicativeness in the applicant. They forget that an applicant is in an unfamiliar situation, faced with unknown questions or experiences, and may be apprehensive.

The interview can be a useful and dependable tool for selecting employees. When interviewing you should:

1. Have a job analysis describing what the job entails and the qualifications needed. Information given and sought is based on it.

2. Plan in advance questions to elicit the information you need.

3. Take steps to put the applicant at ease. Give her an opportunity to remove her coat and be seated in a comfortable chair. A casual question about the bus service or the weather, or a sincere apology if the applicant had to wait any length of time, helps to put her at ease.

4. Prior to the interview, accumulate considerable information about the applicant from an application, by phoning previous employers, and from written references. This background information will suggest pertinent questions to ask.

5. Tell the applicant the kinds of work she will be doing if hired; the amount of walking, standing, or lifting involved; the education she needs; the reports required of her; the pay scale; and about fringe benefits, opportunities for advancement, personal development, etc.

6. Summarize your impressions and information and record them immediately after the interview.

Some professionals find two interviews helpful. The first one, in the office, serves to sepa-

rate applicants who have potential from those who appear destined to fail if hired. The second interview, in the applicant's home, provides information helpful in judging certain abilities that are important in the work of many paraprofessionals such as nutrition education aides and health aides.

When you find the right person for the job, most of your supervisory problems are eliminated before they begin.

TRAINING

In our society *education* is the great panacea. In government, business, and industry this is translated to mean *training*. The miracles training is expected to perform include more and better production, happier employees, improved communication, and less tardiness and absenteeism. In some cases, it is also expected to aid employees in becoming more tactful, more poised, and even better citizens. Incredible as it may appear, training actually does accomplish all of these "miracles" to some extent.

Induction Training

A new paraprofessional is likely to be fearful, uncertain, insecure. Induction training should be planned to answer the many questions filling her mind as well as to provide information about the organization she is joining.

The practical but often overlooked information that a new worker may want includes such basics as (1) Where should I hang my coat? (2) Where is the restroom? (3) May I use the office telephone? (4) Whom should I call if I'm sick and can't come to work?

A complete picture of the organization she is joining should be given each new employee. This might include a description of the program and its *goals*; why the program was undertaken and how it is *financed*; how it fits into the total organization. Formal organizational charts might have little meaning to paraprofessionals, but sketches on a chalkboard might be helpful in showing relationships among national, State, and local agencies, and the relationship of your unit to the total local organization.

New workers need to know the policies and standard operating procedures of the organization. If a handbook is available, give them one. You might mark and discuss sections applicable to the paraprofessionals. If a handbook is not available, you could mimeograph the information and give it to them in a folder.

Workers want to know when, where, and how much they will be paid. They need to have clear and definite information about hours of work, and when, where, and to whom they should report.

Discuss the office facilities available to them. Explain the reports required and how they are used.

The paraprofessionals should visit your office and be told when they can expect to find you in; and if an "open door" policy is the rule, they should be told this.

Outline briefly the training they can expect before they begin work, including the length of time and place of training.

Coffee breaks give opportunities for questions new workers may be too shy to ask before the group. These may give you clues for additional information to include in the induction training.

Research evidence points to the value of having the professional who will supervise the paraprofessionals conduct the induction training. For example, Maier reports Swedish research that demonstrates the value of training supervisors to take responsibility in getting new employees adjusted to their jobs. He says:

> "When supervisors took the initiative for following the progress and development of new employees and saw to it that they were kept informed of reasons behind rules and regulations, an improved relationship between employees and supervisors developed. Employees so treated saw their supervisors as helpers rather than critics; consequently they went to them with their problems . . . and

accepted responsibility on the job more quickly than others."[3]

Learning to Do the Job

Employees who find their induction training a pleasant experience will normally be eager to learn the fundamentals of their job and begin working.

The content of the training course will be based (1) on a careful analysis of the job and (2) a thorough review of the present knowledge and skills of the new workers. (The plan should take into account the individual differences of the workers, in both knowledge and learning ability.) The course outline should appear as a series of lessons directed toward well-defined goals.

When training is planned, all members of the organization should be informed, whether they are directly involved or not. If they know the purpose, time, and place of the training sessions much speculation and misunderstanding can be avoided.

If the training involves only some of the paraprofessionals, you should tell all of them about the training, and give the reasons for including only part of the group. If the others are to have similar, or different but equal training later, tell them so.

The specifics to be taught naturally differ from job to job. However, for many paraprofessionals the training might include:

1. How to make a contact visit
2. How to make a home visit
3. How to conduct a group meeting
4. Subject matter to be presented to homemakers.
5. How to make a teaching plan
6. How to teach others
7. How to plan work
8. Good work habits
9. Resources available to families
10. How to participate in radio and TV programs
11. How to report accomplishments (and uses made of statistical and narrative material)

(More detailed information for training Nutrition Education aides can be found in *Training Home Economics Program Assistants to Work with Low Income Families*, Extension Service, USDA, PA-681.)

You, as the professional educator-supervisor, will probably teach many of the lessons. Other employees of the organization may have special knowledge or skills which can enrich the training. You might ask representatives from agencies with which the paraprofessional may later come in contact to explain their functions to the new workers. (Nutrition education aides would, for example, need to know about the work of the public health department and social welfare agencies.)

Interest is likely to remain high throughout the training if you employ a variety of teaching methods, such as:

Demonstrations
Visual aids
Sound filmstrips
Case (or problem) discussion
Role playing
Field trips
Discussion of principles and procedures
Reading material (suited to the educational level of the learner)
Lectures (Keep in mind that people above average in intelligence get more out of lectures than do average or below average people.)

You should have a "timetable" of how well and by what date you expect each worker to perform each function. This presupposes that the job has been broken down into separate elements or operations.

Set a good example by being ready to teach when the workers assemble.

1. If a filmstrip is to be used, be sure the machine works and the correct film is available. (The fact that national TV networks frequently fumble this does not make it any more acceptable.)
2. If a demonstration is to be given, have the work space properly arranged. Have the right equipment, materials, and tools there, and in proper order.
3. For a group discussion, have the room arranged for easy conversation. Check the temperature and lighting.

[3] Norman R.F. Maier, *Psychology in Industry* (Houghton-Mifflin Co., Boston 1955) p. 580.

4. Regardless of the teaching method used, put the trainees at ease before presenting any material. Learning is difficult if one is embarrassed or frightened.

Trainees will find their new knowledge applicable to many situations if it is organized around principles.

If they are encouraged to restate problems and procedures in their own words, misunderstandings become evident and can be cleared up at once.

Encouraging free discussion and exchange of ideas reveals present level of knowledge and often provides information useful to the group.

Making "cause and effect" relationships meaningful helps increase retention of the material.

Alternating job training with some simple but useful activity helps keep interest high. (The activity might be assembling demonstration kits to be used on home calls, or making cutouts to be used on flannel boards.)

The importance of repetition in learning is well known. Skills and knowledge once learned are soon lost unless they are reinforced. In teaching, several examples to illustrate a point are better than one. Having a trainee do several demonstrations will result in better learning than having her do one. Industry calls this "overtraining" and finds that it is worth the extra time involved.

Training periodically by booster sessions also helps reinforce original learning.

Supervisors need to recognize a plateau of learning, when no apparent progress takes place. This indicates need for another activity for a time.

Pairing a new worker with an experienced paraprofessional is one method of allowing for some field experience midway in the training program. After exposure to the actual working situation, the trainee is likely to have many questions that did not arise in the classroom.

During the training period, be generous with your praise. If learning is slow, you need to be reassuring and patient.

The level of aspiration can be kept high if paraprofessionals are frequently shown the end goal. Seeing themselves as important parts of a team, destined to do important things for families and society as a whole, can spur them on to new learning.

Inservice Training

Like the proverbial woman's work, training is never done. Growth as a person is one of the satisfactions derived from work. Continued learning contributes importantly to such development.

The educator-supervisor will frequently want to give new information or teach new skills to the paraprofessionals working with her. Periodically, changes in program emphasis or new personnel policies need to be explained.

Regular staff meetings provide an opportunity for some inservice training. However, it is generally agreed that longer training sessions are needed periodically to do indepth teaching and to allow for an exchange of ideas among staff members.

To keep morale and interest high, supervisors sometimes arrange for a field trip relevant to the paraprofessionals' work and precede or follow it with a meal together.

Evaluation of Training

At some point you must evaluate the effectiveness of the training. The success of training which was planned with definite goals in mind can be measured against these goals. Did the paraprofessional assimilate the information presented? Did she acquire the skills needed to do the job? How can the supervisor judge?

1. *Written tests* may be used. But remember the educational level of the paraprofessionals and keep the tests simple.

2. *Oral tests* reveal whether the student learned, but they are time consuming since only one student can be tested at a time.

3. *Observing the work done* probably gives the supervisor the best information about the effectiveness of the training. Accompanying a paraprofessional on a home visit, observing her give a demonstration, listening while she teaches a client—these will reveal how effective the training was and suggest areas that need strengthening.

MORALE AND JOB SATISFACTION

Employee morale is one of the most important yet intangible features with which supervisors are concerned. If morale is high, worker unrest is at a minimum.

Not all studies show a positive relationship between high morale and production, however. They do consistently show a direct relationship between turnover and low morale, or job dissatisfaction. Because recruitment, employment, and training are expensive operations, a good supervisor is concerned with morale. In addition to the cost of replacing workers, program activities are interrupted while new paraprofessionals are hired and trained.

You need to consider *characteristics of workers* as well as *job factors* in order to understand why paraprofessionals are satisfied or dissatisfied with their work.

Characteristics of Workers

Age plays an important role in job attitude. Many researchers have studied this phenomenon and found that morale is high when people start their first jobs; it goes down during the next few years and remains at a relatively low level. When workers are in their late twenties or early thirties morale begins to rise, and usually continues to rise through the remainder of the working career.

Length of service is also related to morale. Studies show that workers begin with high morale. During the first year it drops and remains low for several years. As service increases, morale tends to go up.

Sex does not appear to account for differences in morale. Comparisons between job satisfaction of men and women do not reveal any conclusive differences. There is some evidence of greater *variation* among women in their job attitudes than among men. This may be related to the differences among women in their fundamental attitudes toward their roles in life.

Intelligence may or may not affect job satisfaction. There is some data showing that workers with higher I.Q.'s have more sharply defined likes and dislikes in the job situation than do those with lower I.Q.'s.

It is possible that when high morale is found in less educated workers it is a function of age rather than education. Young workers today will be likely to have at least a high school education, while older workers may not have completed even grade school.

Personality and adjustment in relation to work satisfaction have been studied by many researchers. In *Job Attitudes: Review of Research and Opinion*, the authors state that "the satisfied worker is, in general, a more flexible, better adjusted person who has come from a superior family environment, or who has the *capacity to overcome the effects of an inferior environment.* He is realistic about his own situation and about his goals. The worker dissatisfied with his job, in contrast, is often rigid, inflexible, unrealistic in his choice of goals, unable to overcome environmental obstacles, generally unhappy and dissatisfied. It must be emphasized that not all workers with these psychological characteristics are dissatisfied with their jobs. The data do show that dissatisfied workers often show these characteristics."[4]

Job Factors

If one asks what workers want from their jobs, the answers might range from "wages" to "job security" to "everything." Job factors have been categorized in many ways. Some of the more important follow:

Intrinsic aspects of the work include such items as: (1) well-defined work project and duties; (2) opportunities for learning knowledge and skills; (3) personal contacts with outsiders and management; (4) opportunities for creativity and self-expression; (5) opportunity to participate in decisions; (6) variety; (7) opportunity for mobility; (8) effects on health;

[4] Herzberg, Mausner, Peterson, and Capwell, *Job Attitudes: Review of Research and Opinion* (Psychological Service of Pittsburgh, 1957) p. 20.

(9) distribution of the work; (10) recognition, both public and private; (11) self-respect; (12) public service and altruism; (13) responsibility; (14) challenge; (15) tension and pressure.

Supervision, as a job factor affecting morale, takes into account such items as; (1) consideration and fairness; (2) courtesy and tact; (3) appreciation, credit, recognition, and praise; (4) proper evaluation, and information on status and progress; (5) sincerity; (6) cooperation; (7) encouragement; (8) understanding and empathy; (9) availability for assistance and consultation; (10) loyalty to workers; (11) manner of criticism and discipline; (12) delegation of authority; (13) consistency; (14) technical competence.

Working conditions include: (1) clean and orderly work place; (2) absence of smoke, noise, odors; (3) safety conditions; (4) lighting, temperature, and ventilation; (5) adequate equipment and supplies, (6) parking facilities; (7) recreational facilities; (8) geographical location; (9) community.

Wages include: (1) earnings; (2) frequency of raises; (3) fairness of compensation.

Benefits include: (1) provision for emergencies, such as illness or accidents; (2) vacations and holidays; (3) retirement provisions.

Advancement opportunities include: (1) promotion policies, such as advancement on merit, on seniority, promotion from within the organization; (2) economic advancement; (3) ambition and aspiration in relation to advancement; (4) advancement in social position.

Security includes such job features as: (1) steadiness of employment; (2) feelings of being valued by the organization; (3) opportunity to learn new skills; (4) seniority.

The organization contributes to job satisfaction because of: (1) attitude toward workers; (2) size; (3) respect it commands in the community; (4) training programs; (5) fairness; (6) contribution to social welfare; (7) administrative cooperation and assistance; (8) hours (time of beginning and ending workday as well as number of hours worked).

Social aspects of work include: (1) pride in belonging to team and pride in team accomplishments; (2) competent and congenial coworkers; (3) cooperation and group efforts; (4) size and function of work groups; (5) social approval; (6) interpersonal relationships; (7) prejudices; (8) inter- and intra-department relations.

Communication covers: (1) information about new developments; (2) what the organization is doing; (3) personnel policies and procedures; (4) instructions; (5) evaluation of employee.

With at least 5 of the foregoing worker characteristics interacting with the 10 job factors just described, a supervisor might have cause to wonder if an average mortal can hope to maintain high morale in her work group. Many of the factors are beyond the supervisor's control. Some of them she can modify to a certain extent. A few of them are completely in her hands. A wise supervisor accepts the realities of the situation and, rather than wasting energy in fruitless rebellion or frustration, takes positive action in the areas where she can improve job satisfactions.

Basic Human Needs

An unsophisticated rule for good supervision might be a paraphrasing of the golden rule: "Supervise others as you would like to be supervised." This brings us to the human aspects of supervision. Everyone from the janitor to the director of the organization has basic needs that must be met if he is to be happy in his work.

Salary should satisfy the basic needs—food, clothing, shelter; and decent working conditions should provide for physical *safety*. If improvement is needed, the paraprofessional looks to you. If she has the necessary influence to bring about changes for the better, the bond between you is strengthened. If changes can't be made, the relationship need not suffer if you take care to explain why.

The need to *belong*, to be wanted, continues through life. Human beings are social creatures. Rejected people are likely to be problem people. An understanding supervisor will see that all paraprofessionals are included in group activities—work, training, planning.

Being part of the group which establishes goals and standards gives workers an especially strong feeling of belonging. Greater cooperation and greater production, as well as happier, more enthusiastic workers, can be expected as a result.

The *ego* or *esteem* need, the need to feel oneself a person of consequence, must be satisfied if workers are to find satisfaction in their jobs. You should take advantage of every possible opportunity to let workers know how important the total program is and what a vital contribution they are making to it. This can begin in the employment interview, continue through training, and be included in personal contacts, supervisory visits, and periodic personnel evaluations.

Paraprofessionals can be included in meetings with newspaper, TV, and radio reporters; in presentations before other organizations; in reporting to higher echelons of your organization.

Praise good work and good ideas as often as possible, at the moment it is deserved. Praise enhances self-esteem if it is given before other people. Sometimes it can be put in writing so the paraprofessional can take it home to show family and friends. Take care to give some recognition to each worker. The alert supervisor will watch for signs of jealousy and rivalry among employees.

The converse of this, of course, is that criticism should be infrequent and in private. It should be directed at the activity rather than the person, and should be constructive. If possible, it should allow the paraprofessional to "save face." It's human nature to want to maintain one's self-respect. If, for example, the supervisor graciously concedes that instruction was probably faulty, the paraprofessional can more willingly correct the fault.

As other needs are satisfied, the desire for *self-actualization* becomes increasingly important. It is the nature of human beings to move in the direction of greater self-responsibility and greater independence. Research evidence points to a generalized need to achieve success, but people differ markedly in the *need to achieve*. You need to know your paraprofessionals well enough to recognize these differences. Additional responsibility will provide real satisfaction for some workers; for others it may cause frustration or arouse fear of failure. Lack of opportunity to use all of their knowledge and skills leads to job dissatisfaction.

A supervisor concerned with the self-actualization of paraprofessionals will strive for some kind of a career ladder, no matter how elementary.

Studies have shown that level of occupation is important to job satisfaction and that morale improves as the worker takes on increased responsibility.

Experienced workers may be given a part in training new workers, with a title (or a working title) that indicates this responsibility. A worker with artistic talent might be assigned to making visual aids; another, who does a good job of reporting, might help those who are having trouble with this responsibility.

Perhaps you can make arrangements to give interested workers additional on-the-job training. For some workers, encouraging them to enroll in appropriate adult education classes provides opportunities for growth.

A review of worker characteristics, job factors, and basic human needs reveals that employees today are not motivated primarily by the need for the necessities of life. They have these, albeit often meager. The dynamic forces that motivate employees are complex, concerned with group participation, shared decision making, and personal growth. The interested supervisor will strive, through good interpersonal relations, to satisfy these psychological needs.

COUNSELING

Frequently there is a close relationship between an employee's effectiveness on the job and her social and personal problems away from work. Counseling, which helps the worker and the supervisor understand these problems, can open the door to solving employee frustrations and motivation difficulties and to reversing negative attitudes. Knowledge of basic counseling skills can also lead to a less formal relationship between professional and paraprofessional, which tends to strengthen teamwork.

People with deep-seated emotional disturbances should of course, be counseled by a trained clinical psychologist or psychiatrist. Because of this, some supervisors shy away from any form of counseling. Maier says:

> "Some of the important skills for dealing with emotionally disturbed people have been developed in clinics and counseling centers. Many of these skills may be carried out of the original settings and practiced in industry . . . However, any clinical or therapeutic procedures which are to be practiced or used by laymen must be foolproof. Sometimes a little knowledge is dangerous; sometimes a little knowledge is a lot better than no knowledge. The principles that are to be practiced by supervisors must be above criticism. Fortunately the researches of Carl Rogers (*Counseling and Psychotherapy* and *Client-Centered Therapy*) and his students have supplied us with procedures, which, if practiced by a skilled person, seem to be as good as any known alternatives, and if practiced with minimum skill, at least permit the person to do no worse than he would have done before training."[5]

Directive and Non-directive Counseling

The procedures referred to above are called client-centered, or non-directive counseling. Bellows states that:

> "The main difference between the directive and non-directive approach is a difference of degree rather than kind. In the former a somewhat more active part is taken by the counselor on planning, arranging, analyzing, and treating. The non-directive approach is on the extreme end of the active-passive scale which places the burden for adjustment squarely on the counselee. Both directive and non-directive counseling emphasize that the worker-counselee must work out his own problems. He develops better adjustments to his work, social, and home environments by gaining improved insight into his problems in these areas. He does this mainly by talking through his problems before an interested, neutral listener. Both types of counseling, directive and non-directive, stress 'let the counselee do the talking.'"[6]

Because the non-directive approach avoids the need for making a diagnosis and also avoids all the possible dangers associated with a wrong diagnosis or advising unsuitable actions, it is probably the safest counseling method for the supervisor to use. If, in spite of resolutions to avoid giving advice, the supervisor suggests certain actions, she can find comfort in the fact that those who ask for advice seldom take it; thus she will have done little harm!

Setting the stage for a counseling interview is important. Complete privacy should be assured and outside distractions eliminated as far as possible. For example, ask the secretary to hold phone calls, and avoid interrupting with messages.

Comfortable chairs should be provided. Temperature, light, and ventilation should be checked. You should move from behind your desk into a comfortable position for conversation. Have pertinent data and records available.

In setting up an appointment, allow adequate time for the interview.

Welcoming the paraprofessional in a way that puts her at ease is the first step to a good interview. Rise, use the paraprofessional's name in a pleasant greeting, and start the conversation by briefly stating the purpose of the interview.

The problem may not be revealed immediately. In non-directive interviewing, avoid

[5] Norman R.F. Maier, *Psychology in Industry*, (Houghton-Mifflin Co., Boston 1955) p. 596-97.

[6] Roger M. Bellows, *Psychology of Personnel in Business and Industry* (Prentice-Hall, Inc., New York 1955) p. 102.

leading questions or cross-examination. The problem will unfold in direct proportion to your acuity in recognizing the underlying attitudes the counselee is trying to express. Achieving insight into the problem is the goal of the interview. Avoid emotional reactions to the paraprofessional's statements. Avoid a critical attitude (which the counselee can detect as easily as a critical remark); respond to expressed *attitudes* rather than stated facts; avoid injecting your personal opinions and experiences; refrain from lecturing and moralizing.

Accept the feelings and attitudes of the paraprofessional and reflect this acceptance. Use few words, letting the counselee talk. Even if there are *long silences*, wait for the paraprofessional to break them.

Don't argue, break in with questions, or tell the counselee she is wrong. Nor should you assume that the counselee has achieved insight into her problem because the solution to it is obvious to you.

Avoid giving advice, even when asked, except if it is for factual information which you, as a professional, would have. Examples might be: where certain kinds of training can be secured, where certain health services for families are located, etc.

If the worker hasn't worked through her problem by the end of the time allotted for the interview, arrange time for another meeting. Even if the present problem has been solved, leave the door open for future contacts. The interview should be terminated comfortably and pleasantly.

Non-Directive Skills

It is relatively easy to memorize a list of do's and don't's for client-centered couseling. It is harder to observe the rules.

Listening in a non-threatening atmosphere is the basic tool of non-directive counseling. The listener indicates by her posture that she is attentive. Her facial expression is friendly, and she is patient and accepting of pauses. Part of listening is the utterance of expressions which will encourage the worker to continue talking, such as, "I see," "I understand," "Do you want to tell me about it?" "Would you like to tell me how you feel about it?" etc.

Reflecting feelings might also be considered a part of listening. The counselor listens for *feelings*, letting factual material fall into the background. Facts, such as details of an argument—where, with whom, and when it took place—are relatively unimportant. How the counselee feels about it *is* important. The supervisor, by *restating the feeling*, can help the paraprofessional achieve a more objective view of her problem.

This *restating* is probably the most difficult counseling skill for a supervisor to acquire. Since it is such an important part of non-directive counseling, however, it deserves study and practice.

Maier suggests the following 10 points to observe in reflecting feelings:

1. Restate the other person's expressed feelings in your own words, rather than serve as a mimic or parrot.

2. Preface reflected remarks, at first, with "You feel. . .," "You think. . .," "It sometimes appears to you that. . .," and so on. Later in the interview you can dispense with such prefatory phrases.

3. Formulate reflected remarks as statements, not as questions. They should be spoken quietly, slowly, and pretty much in a monotone.

4. Wait out pauses. Long pauses often enable a person to say things that are hard to say. Inexperienced interviewers often are embarrassed by pauses and make distracting reflecting remarks to fill them.

5. When many feelings are expressed, as in a long speech, only the last feeling area should be reflected. (Confusion about many things is one feeling, but feeling immature and hating one's mother are two feelings.)

6. Only feelings actually expressed should be reflected. It may be apparent that a person distrusts another, but distrust should not be reflected unless and until it is explicitly stated. A counselor who disagnoses or anticipates may injure the counseling relationship. Skilled counselors sometimes lead, in that they reflect feelings just a little ahead of those expressed, but unless this leading is accurately and skillfully done it breaks the relationship and frightens the client.

7. When a person contradicts himself, saying on one occasion that he can't understand why someone did something, and on another, that he knows why the person acted as he did, one should reflect each opinion when it is expressed and proceed as if no inconsistency were present.

Such changes in expression indicate progress and a clarification of feeling.

8. If a person cries during an interview, references to the act may be made in reflecting remarks, provided the person is not attempting to hide the tears.

9. Decisions, solutions, and constructive ideas may be reflected when those predominate over feelings of confusion, hostility, fear, insecurity, rejection, and the like. The unskilled counselor is likely to overevaluate these and reflect them before a person is ready to act upon his own suggested possibilities. Searching behavior reveals many possible actions, and a counselor must not try to hasten their acceptance.

10. In reflecting another's state of mind, any indication of approval or disapproval must be avoided. It is important to refrain from questioning, probing, blaming, interpreting, giving advice, persuading, reassuring, and giving sympathy.[7]

Benefits of counseling are hard to measure. However, any insights gained by the supervisor into attitudes and needs of the worker should prove helpful in future relationships. The extent to which the counselee achieves understanding of her problems and works out solutions to them will determine the improvement she makes in her attitudes, motivation, and work performance.

Studies show that as workers solve their problems through non-directive counseling, they become less dependent, more willing to make their own decisions, and better able to cope with day-to-day problems. At least temporary relief from frustration results from non-directive interviewing, and this alone may enable a worker to solve a problem or be more accepting of a situation.

The empathy a supervisor shows throughout an interview often results in a closer relationship between professional and paraprofessional, which in turn tends to strengthen teamwork.

The following quote from Dr. Carl R. Rogers, who is widely regarded as the "father" of client-centered counseling, might encourage hesitant supervisors to use this supervisory tool:

> "Where a client-centered approach is consistently utilized, it is our judgement that rarely would the client leave the experience more disturbed than when he came in.... Client-centered therapy is widely applicable—that, indeed, in one sense it is applicable to all people. An atmosphere of acceptance and respect, of deep understanding, is a good climate for personal growth, and as such, applies to our children, our colleagues, our students, as well as our clients, whether these be "normal", neurotic, or psychotic. This does *not* mean that it will *cure* every psychological condition, and, indeed, the concept of cure is quite foreign to the approach we have been considering.... Yet a psychological climate which the individual can use for deeper self-understanding, for a reorganization of self in the direction of more realistic integration, for the development of more comfortable and mature ways of behaving—this is not an opportunity which is of use for some groups and not for others. It would appear rather to be a point of view which might in basic ways be applicable to all individuals, even though it might not resolve all the problems or provide all the help which a particular individual needs."[8]

[7] Norman R.F. Maier, *Psychology in Industry* (Houghton-Mifflin, Boston 1955) pp. 601-2.

[8] Carl R. Rogers, *Client-Centered Therapy*, (Houghton-Mifflin Co. Boston 1951) p. 230.

GROUP DECISION-MAKING

Professionals searching for ways to provide work satisfaction for the paraprofessionals on their staffs may want to consider the research of social scientists in the field of group decision-making. Involvement in goal setting and problem solving helps satisfy the basic human needs for *belonging* and *self actualization* in a work situation.

Gordon says:

> "People actively search for relationships with others in a group situation because of the promise or expectation that they will be rewarded through the satisfaction of certain needs. Furthermore, people will continue in a group only if they continue to have an expectation of need satisfaction. The problem here is to avoid giving the impression that human behavior can be explained simply by invoking a principle that people seek what gives them immediate reward or pleasure and avoid what does not. To explain human behavior, and in this case the behavior of individuals leading to membership in a group, a more appropriate concept is self actualization .... A group promises the individual the opportunity to grow, develop, fulfill, enhance, create—or simply to *become* that for which he has the potential."*

A new or insecure supervisor might regard group involvement with suspicion or fear. What will this do to her position as the authority, the expert? Won't it be time consuming and frustrating? Will the decisions reached be as good as those she makes alone, based on her training and experience?

Plans are made and problems are solved through the use of human resources—skills, ideas, facts, behavior. (Physical resources within and outside the group are used to carry out the decisions made.) A supervisor who hesitates to use the combined resources of the group might ask herself, "Can I, *without the resources* of the group members, make a wiser decision than the total group, *including me*, can make?" When one considers that paraprofessionals were hired because they understood the life-style of the families with whom they worked, because they could communicate with them, sometimes in another language; because they knew the area, the travel problems, the danger spots—it would seem shortsighted to ignore the expertise they possess when decisions are to be made.

To effectively use group decision-making, the *process* of decision-making must be understood and the skill to lead group discussions must be acquired.

Problem solving or decision-making can be considered in three steps. *First*, there must be some agreement within the group that a problem exists or a decision needs to be made. (You would not ask the group to discuss matters that cannot be changed because of law, policies of the organization, etc. Appropriate for discussion might be (1) goal setting—how many families should a paraprofessional work with in a month? (2) How can one teach a homemaker to cook if she can't read, doesn't speak English, has no equipment? (3) How can one coordinate the teaching of children and homemakers? Etc.)

In some cases the supervisor may have been the first person aware of the problem or the need for the decision regarding some phase of the group's work. Frequently the problem will be brought in by the paraprofessional. Sometimes it will arise because of a difference of opinion among the paraprofessionals, or between the supervisor and the paraprofessionals. Probably at no time will all members of the group see the problem with the same clarity or interest.

Second, the problem must be diagnosed, with all pertinent facts considered. The supervisor may feel that *she* has all of them. Actually, authority figures seldom have all the facts known to members of the group. Information is usually discreetly filtered as it goes through the various levels of an organization. Thus the supervisor may have less accurate and complete information than that possessed by the paraprofessionals. Theoretically, the best diagnosis will

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*Thomas Gordon, *Group-Centered Leadership*, (Houghton-Mifflin Co., Boston 1955) pp. 54-55.

be made when most of the pertinent facts are available.

Third, a decision must be made, accepted, and carried out. Traditionally this has been considered the prerogative of the leader, or the top authority in the organization; however, studies have shown that in democratically led groups in which members were allowed to make decisions about their work, they were less aggressive toward each other, showed less dependence on the leader, took more initiative in starting new work, and spent more time in productive work. Thus social scientists have given support to the common-sense idea that people will more readily accept and carry out a decision they have helped to make than one handed down from higher authority.

The skills needed for leading group discussions can be learned partly through reading, partly through observing others, and partly through practice.

Getting ready for a group meeting involves some introspection and some activity. As a supervisor, are you willing to relinquish your position of *authority* and become a member of the group for the duration of the meeting? Are you willing to come to the meeting with an open mind, honestly seeking the combined wisdom of the group? (If the decision has already been made, members of the group will quickly sense it.)

When paraprofessionals are invited to a group meeting to discuss a problem, they should be told in advance what will be discussed. This gives them a chance to gather information, think through ideas, and come prepared to contribute. The professional, too, makes preparation for the meeting, thinking through the problem as she sees it; deciding on questions to ask at the meeting; securing factual information, maps, charts, etc., which may be helpful in reaching a decision.

The meeting should get off to a good start if the group members have been told the purpose of the meeting in advance, if this is reviewed briefly when they have assembled, and if you have prepared a good opening question. A supervisor who is accustomed to conducting chairman-centered meetings may feel she has no control in a member-centered group. Also, she may find it difficult to relinquish old techniques and employ new ones.

It is well to relax and remember: (1) that the members are *sharing* the responsibility for the meeting, (2) that you are there to help, not to direct, and (3) that you should not expect perfection the first time.

When the opening question has been fully discussed, a lull may follow. If you can refrain from breaking in with a question, a group member may ask a better one. There is no reason to fear silence. It usually means that group members are thinking. If you rush in, you are reverting to chairman-type techniques.

If the discussion has truly bogged down, you may *ask a question of the group as a whole.* Discussion leaders sometimes direct a question to an individual. The member may be caught off guard and simply talk at random, trying for a face-saving answer that contributes nothing to the discussion, then retreat into embarrassed silence for the rest of the meeting.

It is usually a mistake to direct a question to a shy individual, in the belief that it is your responsibility to get everyone to contribute. Given enough time, if she hasn't been frightened or embarrassed, the shy member may come forth with helpful suggestions and information.

A permissive atmosphere must be maintained if members are to discuss freely. This includes freedom to have a "gripe session." Getting things off their chests may clear the air and lead to more fruitful discussions during the rest of the meeting.

When views opposed to yours are expressed, you must guard against responding with speeches of self-justification. Rather, seek for the questions that group members need to have answered or problems they are having that you may be unaware of. You may need to clarify more sharply the problem to be solved, but don't force acceptance of your ideas for a solution.

We speak with our facial expressions and body actions as well as with words. Because of this the supervisor must take care not to *censor* the ideas and attitudes expressed by the group. Members will quickly sense disapproval.

Common Problems of Discussion Groups

Some groups have a member who persists in doing most of the talking or who attempts to entertain the group with clowning. This behavior may stem from a feeling of insecurity and a

desire for recognition. Giving such a person an active role, such as recording the discussion ideas on the chalkboard, may help solve the problem.

Group members sometimes focus on each other instead of upon the problem to be solved. Even if the "gossip" is harmless, it is certainly unproductive. You probably should intervene by asking a question that brings the group back to the stated problem.

Getting off the course, rambling, and lack of focus are common problems. By restating the problem, you can bring the group back to productive discussion.

Repeating material that has been covered can be prevented at least partially by periodically summarizing what has been said and writing the points on a chalkboard.

Lack of progress may indicate that members are unclear about the purpose of the meeting. It may mean that the problem had more facets than you originally thought. Whatever the cause, you can sometimes stimulate the group into productive discussion by briefly summarizing what has been said, pointing out the brief time remaining, and noting that they are far from a solution. Members who have been holding back good ideas because of timidity, or because they first want to hear what others say, may come forth with a flood of helpful information when they realize time is running out.

Conclusion

The discussion meeting may or may not conclude with a decision. If lack of time kept the group from presenting all the pertinent facts and opinions held by the members, or if widely divergent views are apparent, you may set a time for continuing the discussion.

You might divide the group and break the problem into smaller segments. After discussion of a part of the problem, the small groups may gain new insights which will lead to fuller agreement when the groups reassemble.

Formal voting is probably not the best way to conclude a discussion group meeting. The minority won't be any better satisfied after the vote than they were before. They may feel that they weren't given enough time to present their side of the issue, or that the decision was reached before all important facts were available.

Consensus may be a more appropriate means of concluding discussion. When the problem has been fully discussed in a flexible, informal manner you or a member of the group may say, "We seem to be reaching agreement." There may be some negative head shaking or whispered comments between two paraprofessionals, which indicates there is still some dissent; or someone may make a further suggestion. You can then summarize the points of agreement and disagreement. The minority can be given an opportunity to strengthen its position or to ask questions.

It may become apparent that *compromise* is necessary. Sometimes it can be accomplished on the spot. Sometimes you may ask for representatives from the minority and the majority to meet with your to work out the final dicision.

Once the decision has been reached it should be *put in writing*. The paraprofessionals should be given an opportunity to make suggestions for implementing the decision or deciding how it will be incorporated into the ongoing program.

Although one can expect paraprofessionals to be more enthusiastic about working to implement a decision they helped to make than one handed down to them, the time required for discussion usually concerns the supervisor. Actually, in a group that has a good team spirit, you may find that the total group will willingly delegate certain decision-making to one person or to a committee. This may be when the group feels that (1) one person has most of the facts needed for a decision, (2) it trusts a sub-group enough to know that it will not make decisions harmful to the total group, or (3) time is vitally important.

Personal growth of all members of the group, greater job satisfaction, more team spirit, more initiative, and more productive effort can be expected from group decision-making. In spite of the time involved, a supervisor who believes in democratic leadership will use group discussion for solving many of the problems that concern the group.

COMMUNICATION

Better communication is a frequently mentioned suggestion by employees for improving relationships with supervisors or managers. Yet a supervisor who works with a relatively small group of paraprofessionals may give little thought to this aspect of her job. Because she has frequent face-to-face contacts with the workers, presenting information to them and getting their reactions does not seem to pose any problem. Certainly it is easier to achieve adequate communication in this situation than in large groups and far-flung organizations. However, even on a one-to-one basis, communication sometimes flounders because of psychological barriers and lack of empathy.

Since most working groups are part of a larger organization, you should not overlook the importance of communicating with the other units and with superiors. Also, both public and private organizations recognize the importance of communicating with the community, and you should consider this one of your responsibilities.

A number of psychological barriers to communication lie within a group and inhibit understanding:

1. Infrequent face-to-face contacts may result from organizational structure, status differences, or geographical location of workers. There is little opportunity in such situations to check out questions or correct misunderstandings. Further, people who seldom meet may develop stereotyped attitudes about each other. Sometimes these are antagonistic and thus affect communication.

2. A low opinion of the worth of group members does not aid communication. Members may regard only the supervisor's ideas as worthwhile and suggestions from their peers as a "pooling of ignorance."

3. The tendency to defend one's own opinion has been experienced by all of us. A worker will vigorously defend her opinions against ideas that seem to call for her to change. Gordon says:

> "Threatened by pressure from outside to change even a simple belief, the individual takes steps to protect his complicated system of related beliefs from the inevitable shaking up it would suffer should even this one belief become altered .... This basic tendency of the human being to resist change when pressures are put upon him by others is a real barrier to effective communication within a group."[10]

4. Empathy (the ability to put yourself in someone else's place so you can respond as she does) is important for effective communication. The lower your empathy, the less will be your ability to understand and predict needs of workers and to communicate information from management to them.

An organization needs good communication in order to coordinate effectively, maintain satisfied workers, and establish rapport with the community. Yet in some cases it is the very structure of the organization that serves as a barrier.

Many levels of supervision make communication up and down the executive pyramid difficult, slow, and inaccurate. When an idea must pass through many people there is always danger of distortion. Each person may not stray far from the truth and each probably feels she is acting in the best interests of the organization, yet each of several people may present a different picture. For example, one may not report trouble in order to create a good impression of her unit. Another may magnify a problem in order to get additional resources.

It is a well known fact that as information goes up the communication ladder it is "filtered" and "refined," so that the director sometimes receives a story virtually opposite from the one that started at the worker's level.

Insisting that information go up and down the "chain of command" leads to time consuming and cumbersome communication. Where an executive has been embarrassed to find that

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[10] Thomas Gordon, *Group - Centered Leadership* (Houghton-Mifflin Co., Boston 1955) p. 85.

subordinates have taken action on the basis of facts that the executive knew nothing about, he is likely to feel he is losing control and thus insist that everything go through "proper channels."

In some organizations communications directives state that information should flow directly to the people concerned; in others the units contact each other in the most direct way, meanwhile keeping superiors informed of such contacts.

Where formal communication fails to meet the needs of workers *the grapevine* flourishes. Information travels quickly on its many tendrils, and the longer it is, the more erroneous the information becomes. In addition, it sometimes operates in an emotional atmosphere.

Communications Methods

Informal communication may take place between two people over the phone, via interoffice memo, or over a cup of coffee. The supervisor of a group of youth workers may meet the supervisor of nutrition education paraprofessionals for lunch, and in a comfortable, relaxed situation discuss common problems, ways to coordinate programs, plans for the future, etc. Informal, face-to-face communication probably results in greater understanding and satisfaction than any other kind. However, in a large organization other methods must supplement it.

Indirect methods include recruitment, and induction training, when information about the organization and the job is given. Employee evaluation provides further opportunity for communication. Committees and group meetings are effective devices for sharing information. The grapevine, mentioned earlier, might be considered both informal and indirect. However, it often creates misunderstanding and acts as a barrier to good communication.

Formal techniques for communication are numerous. Some are designed to carry information upward, some to bring it from the top down.

Weekly, monthly, and annual reports afford an opportunity for workers to present factual information about their work, their progress, their needs and problems to higher echelons of the organization. Summaries of such reports, prepared by top management, communicate information about the total organization to the workers. Sometimes such information is also presented to the public in various ways; and, in the case of government programs, is, at least in part, the basis on which requests for funding are made.

Suggestion boxes are used in some organizations to encourage workers to communicate with their superiors. If awards are offered for suggestions that are accepted, the identity of the one who made the suggestion must be made known. Sometimes workers are fearful of pointing out weaknesses in the organization and so refrain from presenting their ideas, regardless of rewards offered.

If many suggestions are rejected in comparison to the number used, workers may become disenchanted with the system and ignore it.

However, paraprofessionals are likely to have many suggestions, complaints, and questions, and if the suggestion box will bring some of these to the attention of the supervisor, it is worthwhile.

A modification of the suggestion box is a request for *group suggestions*. Strauss says that group suggestions have these advantages.

1. They give the suggesters anonymity and also discourage the employee who has many half-baked ideas and may be more interested in getting recognition than in producing a real improvement.

2. Groups produce fewer but better suggestions. Before submission the originating group does an appraising and sifting job, thinking through each idea, its implications, and the problem of applying it.

3. Developing suggestions improves cooperation among the group members, and when an award is made, the sharing of it avoids the jealousy that is often a by-product of individual awards. Also, a shared award encourages the members to try again.

4. A group suggestion gets a better hearing from both impartial reviewers and people whose work it would affect indirectly, because group suggestions usually are better thought out and their applicability is more easily recognized.[1]

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[1] Bert and Frances Strauss, *New and Better Ways to Meetings* (The Viking Press, New York, 1964) p. 128.

If you give paraprofessionals the go-ahead to hold meetings to devise suggestions, it is evidence that you have confidence in their ability and want them to participate in the operation of the unit.

Bulletin boards are commonly used to present information to workers, with varying degrees of success. Workers will soon stop looking at a board that contains outdated material or information of little interest to them. Following a few basic rules will make it more effective.

1. Place it where all workers pass, such as beside the water cooler or near the restroom door.
2. Check it daily. Remove old material.
3. Keep all messages brief. They should have a *maximum* reading time of half a minute.
4. Messages should tell something the paraprofessional wants to know—new privileges, location of adult education classes of interest to the worker, group meeting time, etc.
5. Bulletin boards can call attention to lengthy material, telling where it may be obtained.
6. Information that will stop rumors—personnel changes, for example.

Letters to employees can insure that everyone gets the information in the same words and at the same time. These might tell about expansion of the program or a new policy of the organization. A new director might introduce himself to the workers through a letter. New safety regulations might be presented or old ones reinforced.

Enclosure slips with checks are a way to get information to paraprofessionals. They can serve the same purpose as letters, but are usually brief and not personalized with the worker's name and address.

Company manuals present the policies of the organization. They are especially valuable during induction training, but supervisors find that referring to them during regular staff meetings insures that workers remember the contents.

Company magazines are sometimes published for public relations as well as employee relations. Even though these may be designed primarily for the professional staff, you may want to consider the feasibility of providing copies to paraprofessionals.

At least one company conducts a "rumor clinic" in connection with its magazing. A "coupon" is printed in each issue. On this the worker writes the rumor he has heard and drops it in a "Rumor Box." The next issue provides the facts needed to clear up the rumor.

Newsletters which give program accomplishments, personal items about workers, and a "message" from the supervisor are popular with workers and encourage a team spirit.

Attitude surveys are usually undertaken to uncover areas that trouble workers. Such surveys often reveal faulty downward communication, showing that workers are unfamiliar with many policies that affect them and that worker morale is low because of misunderstandings.

Public address systems are used in many large companies to present information. However, these have little value for a paraprofessional who spends much of her time in field work.

Posters are often used to tell of safety programs, community drives, etc.

Meetings are sometimes called to present important information to all employees at one time. Examples might be (1) when the director wants to impart a message personally, or (2) when it is important that all employees get accurate and complete information rather than possible distortions or a watered-down version.

It would be fruitless to search for the one best way to communicate within an organization. Someone said: "Orders travel down and information travels up." While this is true, it is far from an adequate description of the communication that needs to take place to foster human understanding and teamwork.

An effective supervisor aims to devise a communication program that will eliminate suspicion, resentment, frustration, misunderstanding—between paraprofessional and herself; professional coworkers and herself; and the upper levels of management and herself. Good communication is the cement that binds an organization together. It is worth all the thought, time, and effort it takes.

CONTROL

Paraprofessionals, like any other workers, are likely to shudder at such words as control, discipline, and punishment. Supervisors may fear and dislike the words even more. Yet the professional responsible for the quality and amount of work done will, sometime in her career, need to take corrective action.

Quality and Amount of Work

The positive approach to control, of course entails hiring the right people, involving them in setting standards and goals, and providing adequate training. Frequent personal contacts, careful reading of reports, and periodic observation of the paraprofessional at work provide you information about the quality and amount of work done. Having clients evaluate the teaching of the worker gives additional information.

When the need to criticize work arises, remember that it is easier to say what is *wrong* than to tell or show what is right. Criticism should be withheld until it can be constructive. It should relate to standards and goals previously set; methods taught in training sessions; or organizational policies which have been explained to the worker.

Criticism should always be given in private. If you are angry or irritated, wait until you have calmed down before asking the worker to come in for a conference.

The paraprofessional should be given an opportunity to "save face." If she feels that you truly want to help her she will accept criticism without resentment or bitterness.

Yoder says:

> "It must be recognized that any disciplinary problem, unless the worker or workers involved are emotional or mental cases, indicates some weakness in management. Managerial policy should be preventive rather than punitive. Hence, alert management attacks disciplinary problems in their incipient stages before they emerge as problems. Similarly, all disciplinary action should have a positive rather than a negative effect, that is, it should encourage workers, including those particularly affected by it, to cooperate rather than to resent the action and resolve to retaliate. The whole disciplinary phase of management is likely to be unsatisfactory if it results in disorganized employee morale and feelings of resentment and persecution rather than recognition of the reasonableness and propriety of disciplinary action. At the same time, such action must be effective, it must get results. It can be regarded as satisfactory only if it reduces offenses."[12]

Autocratic Versus Democratic Discipline

Inability to get along with people and personal problems of workers are more often cause for dismissal than is inability to do the work. Because of this, supervisors need to consider the kind of disciplinary methods they will use.

Traditional military discipline, with orders from the top carried out to the letter by those at the lower levels, is *autocratic control* that is unacceptable to many workers as well as ineffective in most work situations.

Psychological control is quite different. The supervisor is employee oriented; training and counseling are stressed; and discipline and enforcement are deemphasized. A *human relations* approach is used. This does not mean that the supervisor gives up control or disregards discipline. It does mean seeking to reconcile conflicting attitudes and seeking to solve the present problem without creating another one that is insurmountable.

Undesirable effects of punishment should be understood by the supervisor:

1. Uncooperative and emotionally unstable workers are likely to be frustrated by disciplinary action. All workers probably are frustrated if they feel the punishment was unfair.

2. Punishment and the thought of punishment creates a hostile attitude. If one is punished for doing a poor job, unfavorable

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[12] Dale Yoder, *Personnel Management and Industrial Relations* (Prentice Hall, Inc., New York, 1942) p. 542.

attitudes toward the work may develop. (Rewards for good work create the opposite effect.)

3. Threat of punishment is sometimes used to prevent certain behavior. This is destructive rather than constructive. Training in "do this" should replace "don't do that."

4. The threat of punishment creates fear and reduces the acceptance of suggestions. Behavior is changed less by arousing fear than by considerate, reasonable methods.

Unsatisfactory work should be detected early, and the wise supervisor will not ignore it. The sooner you deal with it openly and honestly the better. This need not be an unpleasant confrontation. Actually, people usually appreciate help. If the paraprofessional sees you as someone who is on her side, she may find the discussion a gratifying and worthwhile experience.

If after adequate help has been given you see no improvement, try another counseling interview, and perhaps even a third. Then if work continues unacceptable, you may want to bring your superior in on the case to determine the next step. Keep a record with dates and brief notes of each discussion. In the few cases where an employee must be discharged, you should have some evidence of the period of time the work has been unsatisfactory and the steps you have taken to correct the situation.

Grievances may arise between workers or may relate to some phase of the work. Even though you may feel the issue is trivial, handle it at once lest it "snowball" into a big problem. Ask the people concerned to meet to talk it over. Get all the facts available about the grievance. If more than one person is involved, give each an opportunity to tell her side. Sometimes the opportunity to talk it over in a non-threatening situation will clear the air, and the problem practically solves itself. When a final decision is made, it must be fair to all concerned, and it should be thoroughly understood by all.

Personality problems can be disruptive. A paraprofessional (or a supervisor, for that matter) may be moody, tactless, opinionated, have a persecution complex or some other "fault" that is annoying to others.

Sometimes the root of the problem lies in a personality clash. Transferring the worker to another unit may solve the problem, but more often you must find the solution.

A counseling interview to get at the cause of the problem is probably the best place to start. The paraprofessional must be told kindly but honestly what the interview is about. If you have acquired some skill in non-directive counseling, the meeting may result in both the worker and you understanding the problem better. If you promise to help the worker overcome the fault, she may make a sincere effort herself. Followup is important. Notice improvement or lack of it, and discuss it with the worker.

Sometimes efforts to help are ineffective. When this becomes evident, a conference with a higher authority is usually needed before a decision is made. Sometimes the worker can be counseled to seek other, more suitable employment, or train for work where her personality problems will not affect her production.

Misconduct includes tardiness, divulging information families have given in confidence, falsifying reports, absenteeism, intemperance, stealing, and other acts which disrupt the program.

Since tardiness is a common problem, and since the approach to correcting many kinds of misbehavior is the same, it can serve as an example.

Before calling a paraprofessional in to discuss the problem, be sure of the facts. Encourage the worker to tell you the reason for her habitual tardiness. It may be heavy family responsibilities which result in fatigue; perhaps many lunches have to be packed before the children are sent to school in the morning; there may be illness in the family; the alarm clock may be faulty; public transportation schedules may make it difficult for the worker to arrive on time; lack of housing near the place of work may force the employee to live far from the office; bad weather may interfere with transportation, etc. If the underlying reason can be discovered, a "cure" may possibly be found.

Older children can be encouraged to help with the housework; school lunches can be packed the night before; help from a public agency may be available for a sick family member; a new alarm clock may be a good investment when the worker realizes the seriousness of chronic tardiness; working hours

may be adjusted to more nearly conform to public transportation schedules; housing nearer the office may be located with some help from you.

A suggested solution should be acceptable to the paraprofessional. Promptly give any assistance you promised during the interview. If you see no improvement in a reasonable length of time (*reasonable length* depends on the cause of the tardiness) you will need to call the employee in for another interview. After a second chance, the third interview will probably be with you and your superior, or the personnel officer.

In most cases the supervisor does not have authority to dismiss an employee. She should not threaten dismissal unless she is *very sure* she has this authority.

Long before a misconduct problem reaches the stage where dismissal should be considered, you will want to acquaint your superior with the case. This lets a higher authority make suggestions and flags the possibility of direct involvement later on.

Some organizations exact penalties for tardiness. It may be loss of vacation time, or a half hour's pay for each 15 minutes of tardiness. Opinion as to the effectiveness of this is divided. One must consider the fact that the penalty does nothing to get at the underlying cause, and the paraprofessional will probably resent the fact that automatic rules do not take individual circumstances into account.

Indebtedness may be a problem for both worker and employer. Collectors who attempt to contact the debtor at work can interfere with production and the worker's morale. When wages are attached, the organization is inconvenienced.

Training in money management may help. If many debts of long standing are involved, the paraprofessional may be referred to a debt adjustment service.

Reducing Failures

Supervisors want to reduce failures. To this end they select employees carefully, train them well, counsel them when necessary, and reprimand with restraint. They adjust physical and external situations when needed, modify plans when necessary, and improve motivation through every means at their disposal. A supervisor who has taken care of these responsibilities may never be faced with the need to discipline. A satisfied worker is rarely a troublemaker.

PLANNING AND USE OF TIME

Supervisors who have orderly minds probably do a good job of planning, coordinating, and scheduling without attaching a name to the various processes. They believe in the motto, "First things first." They can distinguish between what is important and what is trivial. They are aware of the areas where their unit meshes with another and time activities accordingly. They look and think ahead. They see the job as a *whole* and coordinate activities toward a goal.

Self-Organization

A supervisor who is poorly organized is probably at least vaguely aware of it. She will need to practice self-organization before she can expect it of her staff members or help them achieve it. Some things that indicate a disorderly mind are:

1. *Lack of punctuality*. This may be because preparation for a meeting was delayed until the last minute; because long distance calls were placed too close to the time of the meeting; because a clear schedule of appointments wasn't kept on both the supervisor's desk and the secretary's. An honest look at reasons for bad timing should lead to correction. A courteous professional does not want to inconvenience others by being late and doesn't want her organization to absorb the cost of time wasted while a roomful of people wait for her.

2. *Unreliability*. Failing to carry out promises soon leads both higher authority and paraprofessionals to lose faith in the supervisor. It takes but a moment to say, "I'll take care of that." The orderly supervisor doesn't say it unless she has the time, or authority, or resources to *do it*. When she promises, she makes a *written* note of it and then she follows through.

3. *Disorderly desk*. A supervisor who lets material pile up on her desk and remain there for days or weeks runs the risk of overlooking important matters that have deadline dates. She wastes her time and her secretary's time hunting for letters and reports; and gets tired and frustrated just looking at the accumulated work to be done. Most papers that arrive at a supervisor's desk need be handled only once—dropped in the waste basket; put in the "file" basket; or have a note written on them which enables the secretary to draft a letter for the supervisor's signature, send the material requested, etc. Some material must be handled twice. Letters to which a reply must be dictated go into a basket or folder. Reports to be analyzed are placed in a folder and then in a desk drawer, etc. An orderly desk indicates an efficient, well-organized supervisor. It can be achieved, but it takes hour-by-hour attention and concentration. It eventually becomes habit.

4. *Lack of a memo system*. A desk calendar showing the whole month, with room for daily notations provides a simple method of keeping track of appointments, meetings, field trips, due dates for reports, etc. Add to this a card divided into thirds. At the beginning of the week list in the first column the items which must be attended to that week, in the second column, the items that must be done in a reasonable length of time but are less urgent, and in the third column, the people to be seen and the subject to be discussed. A memo pad and pencil in your purse for recording promises made and good ideas as they occur complete this simple but effective memo system which frees the mind of countless details.

Planning

Effective supervisors spend some of their time planning—thinking creatively about the program. A new supervisor may feel that planning is the prerogative of higher authority. Many aspects of the program may be determined by law. The amount of money available for the program is determined in the overall budgeting for the organization. Why, then, should she spend time dreaming about making changes in the future?

Some planning may clearly be the responsibility of the supervisor—the amount and kind

of training to be given; ways to coordinate the program with other programs to achieve maximum effectiveness, etc. But in addition to this, a creative supervisor looks to the future. Should the program be curtailed in this area and expanded in another? Would certain specialists help improve the teaching? Is there an innovative approach to reaching the unit's goals which should be tried?

Occasionally you may want to meet with the paraprofessionals to search for ways to improve their teaching or some other phase of their work.

The first step in such a discussion involves listing the details of the job as it is now being done. Then the group questions every detail.

- Why is it necessary?
- What's its purpose?
- What's the best way to do it?
- Who is the best person to do it? Why?
- What details can be eliminated?
- Should new details be added? What details?
- Could the task be combined with another one?
- Would it be practical? Why · why not?
- Could work sequence be rearranged for greater effectiveness?

The conclusions arrived at in such discussion meetings should be put in writing, presented to the proper people, and the paraprofessionals informed of any action or reaction.

Involving paraprofessionals in the discussion draws on the experience and creativity of the *total group* and predisposes them to accept changes if some should later be made.

An interested, enthusiastic supervisor will always be exploring new ideas. She will develop proposals, projects, and ideas for presentation to higher authority. Money can sometimes be found to implement good ideas. Some changes that don't require money may make real improvement in the program. Without changes programs tend to stagnate. Certainly the supervisor who is close to the program, its achievements, and its problems is in a good position to formulate plans for the consideration of those who must make the final decision.

Scheduling

Many Extension people call the process of making an orderly listing or scheduling of the events planned in their program "calendaring." You and the paraprofessionals will need to list training sessions, conferences, vacations, etc., on your personal calendars, regardless of what you choose to call this action. The known events should be listed for at least 12 months in advance.

In addition, you need more detailed schedules for weekly and monthly operation. To arrive at a workable schedule one needs to know (1) the tasks to be done, (2) how long each one takes, and (3) who is available to do the work.

Since a complete description of the work is needed for recruitment and training, this should be readily available.

The time needed to perform each task is harder to ascertain. In a manufacturing process one can use a stopwatch to find how long it takes each of several workmen to insert a screw. By making allowance for the slow worker and the fast one, a reasonable time for the task is agreed upon.

Human beings are not as predictable as machines, however. Even if all the paraprofessionals were exactly the same, the time needed to make a contact visit would vary because of differences in the person contacted, the kind of weather, the distance to be traveled, and many other factors peculiar to that situation. In spite of variations, you and the paraprofessionals can, through discussion; come to agreement on approximately how long a contact visit, a working visit, an evaluation visit, or any other phase of the work takes.

Reports take time, but how much? For someone who has difficulty with arithmetic or writing, it may take much longer than for others with better education or quicker minds.

Preparing for a home visit takes time. Visuals must be assembled; perhaps shopping must be done. A review of records of former visits with the family may be needed.

Scheduling with paraprofessionals, then, must take into consideration the human differences as well as when and how much work is to be done. It will also provide a cushion of extra time for coffee breaks and emergencies. Flexibility is important, to allow for a change of plan if the situation changes. The goal should be

to schedule so realistically that need to deviate is the exception rather than the rule.

Analyzing Schedules

When scheduling your own work, and when working with paraprofessionals on theirs, be on the lookout for ways to balance the workload and increase efficiency.

Should the season of the year, weather conditions, experience of the worker influence the amount of work one can reasonably expect?

Have some workers been given many special assignments without any lessening of their regular work? Is the distribution of the work among the paraprofessionals fair and realistic?

Are certain tasks being done by each paraprofessional that could be done for the group by one person, thus saving time, and sometimes energy and travel funds? Examples might be shopping for demonstration supplies, preparing visual aids, getting information from an adult education center.

Are paraprofessionals doing work that a janitor or handyman in the building could do? Are paid workers doing tasks that volunteers might be glad to do? Are there things volunteers might do which do not fall strictly within the program description, yet might be a worthwhile supplement? (For example, a family receiving nutrition education from a paraprofessional might need to learn to mend or sew in order to stretch the budget. A volunteer might willingly fill this need.)

Use of Secretary

Could the secretary do some of the things now being done by the supervisor? Added responsibility is usually welcomed by people who have ability. Probably most secretaries could do higher level work than that they are normally given.

Many supervisors will agree that their secretaries are capable, but point out that they just haven't time to take on any more duties. Work with your secretary in setting up a daily, weekly, and monthly schedule. This may reveal that she has a full workload; or it may show that at certain times of the day, or week, or month she has a light load and could take on additional tasks.

Examine the use you make of your secretary's time. Do you push the buzzer every few minutes to ask for "this" or tell her "that"? A well-organized supervisor will list the things she needs, make notes on the margins of incoming letters, etc., so that instead of interrupting the secretary a dozen times she will call her only once. Have a regular time for dictating letters—perhaps the hour just before lunch. The secretary then can plan her morning's work. She can type the letters in the afternoon, and they can be signed and put in the mail that day.

Evaluating

Periodically, review previous schedules with paraprofessionals and secretary. Was it possible to accomplish as much work as anticipated? If not, why? Would it have been possible to do more? A free and frank discussion will lead to better scheduling and probably to greater production.

Time invested in planning and scheduling pays big dividends in work accomplished and frustrations eliminated. Give this phase of the work your best thinking.

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